

The Web 2.0 Classroom

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Web 2.0 is a “buzzword” as is “Classroom 2.0,” but with the habit software developers have used of numbering their software, (*The higher number represents the newer version*), educators and industry have begun to “number” the Internet.

The use of this term has marked the transition of the Internet from a place where we surf on information and consume information to a place where we are creators of information. In essence we go from surfing the wave to BEING the wave itself as we contribute and share information on the Internet ocean.

Web 2.0 encompasses any type of new content creation technology: blogs, wikis, podcasts, video sharing, photo sharing, web page creation, social bookmarking, cell phones, iPods and a wealth of other technologies that will soon be invented. Notice that technologies like cell phones are included in this definition. Web 2.0 is more than just Internet it is literally a web that connects us through all of the communications devices we carry.

The Six Pillars of an effective Web 2.0 classroom

I believe that every effective Web 2.0 classroom is held up by six pillars:

1. Internet Safety and Privacy
2. Information Literacy
3. Internet Citizenship
4. Internet Teamwork
5. Intentional Internet Activities
6. An Engaged Teacher

Internet Safety and Privacy

As students and teachers move into the Internet ocean, they should understand how to protect their identity, report inappropriate behavior, and communicate safely. This simple challenge has tempted many well-meaning educators and parents to completely shut students off from the real Internet world. This is a grave disservice.

I liken this to having a saltwater fish in a saltwater fishbowl. If the intent is to release the fish into the ocean, the longer the fish remains in the fishbowl, the more difficult it will be for that animal to make it in the ocean where there are predators.

As I use this analogy with my students I explain to them that we are swimming on the shores of a vast ocean and that we have shark nets in place (filters, etc.). Just like it is possible for a shark to get through a shark net, it is possible any time we're online to run into “sharks.” That is why they must communicate with the lifeguard (the teacher) and be aware. They also should know

how to protect their privacy. In effect, good privacy skills will help camouflage them from sharks when they swim in the Internet ocean without me.

I believe as a student nears graduation from high school, that a progressive strategy of Internet freedoms should be allowed so that when it is time for them to interact in the “real world” Internet that they can do so safely for a lifetime. Students who are not taught these skills become virtual “shark bait” in my opinion! Just as writing should be a part of every classroom (even math), so should Internet privacy and safety skills. It is a ubiquitous skill that is essential for succeeding in today’s world.

Information Literacy

The information on the Internet is created by people with varying agendas, knowledge, and opinions. Students must move from a “textbook” world where they are taught to trust everything that is printed in their book, to an online world that requires investigation, source checking, and discernment. This is a skill that must be taught by those who have discernment and often requires students to be exposed to sources of information that may have error.

Internet Citizenship

The ability to disagree, discuss, communicate, edit, and share in effective, meaningful, ethical ways is a vital skill for the 21st century workforce. We’ve all seen the political blog whose comments degrade into virtual profanity matches between disagreeing parties!

Teachers must educate students on the ethics of posting accurate information, how to comment on topics where they agree and disagree. They need to understand that the Internet is not a joke! It is real life! Everything they create serves as a virtual tattoo that they often cannot remove from Google’s cache. With 75% of businesses now Googling potential employees, even things that students consider “play” are not.

Internet Teamwork

Collaborating with other classrooms via Internet, cell phones, and all types of exciting technologies is easier than ever. Cultural differences must be discussed. Students (and adults) must learn how to edit one another’s work with sensitivity and wisdom. I often provide inter-class projects so that students can learn to read, analyze, identify gaps in knowledge, edit, and contribute appropriately.

In an emerging global economy, students must know how to cooperate with their seatmate, students at a rival school, across the country, and across the world. Meaningful collaboration between students through wikis and other collaborative technologies are essential to the very future of our world and fabric of our society.

Intentional Internet Activities

Internet with a purpose! Students who surf the Internet during class have been proven to have lower grades. This is Internet to distraction and not purpose. The Web 2.0 classroom has purposeful uses of the Internet.

Everything I do in my classroom has a reason. Either I'm teaching one of the skills listed above or I'm teaching a curriculum objective (usually both.) Some educators have steeled themselves against integrating Internet resources into their curriculum because of the distraction and absent minded surfing they envision will result! We have no time to waste!

Everything a teacher does should have a purpose! It is planned. It is *somewhat* tested. It is monitored. It is assessed. It is NOT a babysitting service. It is not a virtual time wasting worksheet.

Students are good at discerning if what they do has purpose and if it means something to the teacher. If it is not meaningful, it is not worth doing.

I use a wealth of online and offline tools, assessments, activities, organizers, and plans. If an offline tool works best, such as a paper-based graphic organizer, I use that. If an online tool works best, that is what we use.

Online tools have the edge for engagement

I will say that social networking, Internet based tools have the edge on connecting and communicating with today's students. They are connected through the Internet but often strangely disconnected with the papers and pens put before them in the classroom.

For example, here are alternatives a web 2.0 foreign language educator might use in lieu of the old cassette tape recorder:

- ☐ Have them record conversations or verb conjugation for playback and study using their cell phone recording feature or
- ☐ Have them dial into a phone number that records this and turns it immediately into a podcast that can be downloaded or listened to on the Internet (www.odeo.com) each student could do a different verb or conversation or
- ☐ Have them don headsets and talk with students across the world via Internet telephones (www.skype.com). or
- ☐ Have them conjugate verbs across the room and text one another their answers in a contest.
- ☐ Have them use a digital recorder like an iPod to record a Spanish conversation and share it with the class.
- ☐ Have them find and download authentic foreign language text and/or music onto their iPod or MP3 layer to plug into your class speakers and share with everyone. They are then to translate it.

These are six Web 2.0 ways of making a boring "offline" task exciting.

Engaged Teacher

This is an essential element for the effective Web 2.0 classroom. I believe there are three characteristics of the engaged Web 2.0 teacher:

1. They are connected
2. They are open minded.
3. They are vigilant.
4. They hold students and themselves accountable.
5. They have character.
6. They are passionate about their topic.

The best Web 2.0 teacher is a part of the web themselves. They have an RSS reader and subscribe to blogs in their topic. They comment on blogs and stay abreast of real time innovations in their field. They are connected to other educators in their field and often share their own best practices with others. They consider new technologies and are not prone to make knee jerk statements without considering the facts. They model what they teach.

This teacher effectively supervises their students, usually through RSS. They hold people accountable for all activities that happen in their online classroom. No distinction is made between the internal classroom inside the school house and those that are online.

These Web 2.0 educators have character and openly discuss ethical issues with their students. They are up front (*in an age appropriate way*) about Internet predators, privacy, SPAM, and all real world Web issues.

The best Web 2.0 educators are passionate about teaching their topic. This statement I recently shared on my blog (<http://coolcatteacher.blogspot.com>) is perhaps the best way to express this:

We will educate by any means necessary!

We will leave behind our preconceived notions!

We will go into territory where we do not feel comfortable!

We will go where our students congregate and interact!

We will do what it takes to reach the most disconnected and connected generation in history.

Education is a perpetual crisis that always leaves us *one generation from anarchy!*

Teaching must be done by

ethical,

wise,

people of character

who have education of their topic as their aim

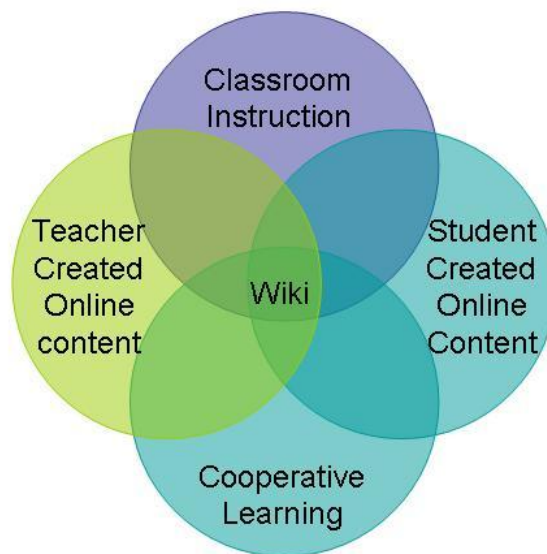
and **any means necessary as their methodology.**

What does my Web 2.0 classroom look like?

Each person's classroom will deploy different tools depending upon the topic that is being taught. For example, Darren Kuropatwa's math class uses a blog to post class notes and he uses a wiki to recognize achievement. My wiki-centric classroom looks like this:

Pedagogy of a Wiki-Centric Classroom

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We use: blogs, wikis, photosharing, RSS feeds, news services, video sharing, podcasting, and are constantly adding new tools as they fit with our curriculum. Every tool has its purpose and objective. The wiki is the center of my classroom organization and content delivery.

In Conclusion

The Web 2.0 classroom is not an entrenched classroom, it is an adaptive classroom. You will see a consistency of content from year to year but often see a variability of tools used to relay the content.

I know an educator (at another school) whose curriculum is so controlled that she is not given the freedom to use any tools. She is restricted from accessing any social networking tools on the Internet. She is only allowed us use the mimeographs in her teacher-approved worksheet book. The curriculum director has micromanaged the life out of her classroom.

Administrators must empower teachers and hold them accountable for teaching the content, but they should allow the teachers access to and training on a variety of tools. We must educate children who will be able to succeed and thrive in an online world. Uneducated children of today become the Internet's victims of tomorrow.

This is more than just increasing learning and student engagement, this is the future of our children.